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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 000070

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: FOREIGN SECRETARY'S FAREWELL DINNER FOR THE
AMBASSADOR

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, reason: 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) Summary: Foreign Secretary Romulo hosted on January 11 an intimate cabinet dinner for departing Ambassador Kenney. In a brief preliminary meeting with the Ambassador, Romulo stressed his gratitude for strong military-to-military relations, for U.S. disaster relief during flooding and the recent volcano activity, and for progress made towards an MCC compact. He stressed the importance the GRP placed on the upcoming NPT review and his pleasure that Special Representative Susan Burk would be arriving in a few weeks for preparatory meetings. Romulo reiterated the GRP's commitment to work within ASEAN to keep pressure on Burma. DFA U/S lead negotiator with the MILF Rafael Seguis thanked the Ambassador for U.S. support to the peace process, while conveying his concern that a comprehensive agreement might not be reached by the end of the Arroyo Administration. Offering a toast to the Ambassador during a dinner which included Secretary of Defense Bert Gonzales, Cabinet Secretary Ermita, Finance Secretary Teves and Presidential advisor Poblador, Romulo listed his four greatest moments as Foreign Secretary -- and first on the list was Secretary Clinton's recent visit. End Summary.

Tour D'Horizon

¶12. (C) In a brief preliminary meeting Secretary Romulo, accompanied by U/S Seguis and A/S for North America Yparraguire, thanked the Ambassador for her contributions and cited improved military-to-military relations as a key achievement. Romulo offered his gratitude for U.S. disaster relief efforts, and expressed the Arroyo administration's delight at progress on MCC compact negotiations. He expressed his hope that, as the deadline nears for veterans to apply for one-time benefits under the Filipino Veterans' Equity Compensation program, the Embassy would reinvigorate outreach. The Ambassador assured him we would redouble our efforts over the next five weeks until the deadline. The Ambassador in turn thanked the DFA Secretary for his able leadership, and noted we particularly appreciated the GRP's principled stance on Burma. The Ambassador reminded of our efforts to engage the Burmese but said we would need continued strong support from our ASEAN partners to push Burma. We need to see some movement from the Burmese in the right direction. Romulo agreed and assured the Ambassador that the GRP would continue to press ASEAN colleagues to keep the pressure on Burma. The Ambassador noted our confidence in the Philippines' leadership of the NPT review conference, prompting Romulo to assure her it was a high priority and express his delight that Special Representative Burk would travel to Manila for preparatory meetings. He also reiterated President Arroyo's commitment to attend the Nuclear Security Summit in Washington in April.

¶3. (C) Turning to the peace process, U/S Seguis expressed his government's gratitude for U.S. support for the ongoing process with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Recent talks had not been productive, and Seguis now doubted that a comprehensive agreement could be reached before the end of the Arroyo Administration. Nonetheless, he would continue to engage, in the hopes of a breakthrough. The Ambassador noted that, even in the absence of a comprehensive agreement, current talks could lay a strong foundation for the next Administration to build on. Moreover, talks meant the cease-fire would remain in place. Seguis agreed, and later told the DCM that Malaysian facilitator Othman would be in Manila soon to consult with both sides and the International Contact Group (UK, Japan, and Turkey, along with international NGOs) to look for a way forward.

Greatest Hits

¶4. (C) During the dinner with select cabinet members, Secretary Romulo also confided that he had invited Senator Inouye to visit the Philippines and hoped to see the Senator here in April. He himself planned to serve President Arroyo until the end of the Administration and had no onward plans after the change in Administration. In remarks to the guests he listed his four greatest moments as Secretary, and first among them was Secretary Clinton's recent visit.

KENNEY